

PCT/IB04/01012



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

PRIORITY DOCUMENT

SUBMITTED OR TRANSMITTED IN
COMPLIANCE WITH RULE 17.1(a) OR (b)

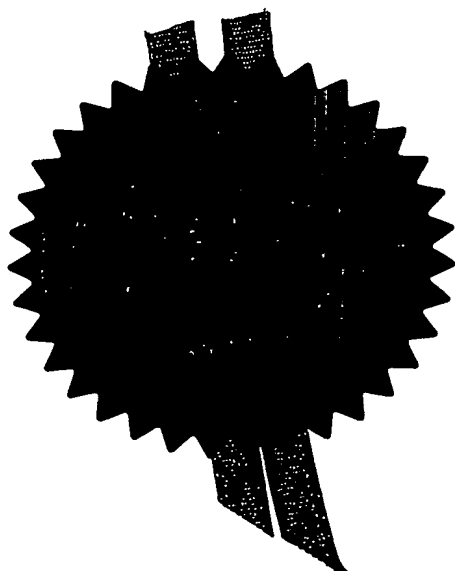
The Patent Office
Concept House
Cardiff Road
Newport
South Wales
NP10 8QQ

I, the undersigned, being an officer duly authorised in accordance with Section 74(1) and (4) of the Deregulation & Contracting Out Act 1994, to sign and issue certificates on behalf of the Comptroller-General, hereby certify that annexed hereto is a true copy of the documents as originally filed in connection with the patent application identified therein.

In accordance with the Patents (Companies Re-registration) Rules 1982, if a company named in this certificate and any accompanying documents has re-registered under the Companies Act 1980 with the same name as that with which it was registered immediately before re-registration save for the substitution as, or inclusion as, the last part of the name of the words "public limited company" or their equivalents in Welsh, references to the name of the company in this certificate and any accompanying documents shall be treated as references to the name with which it is so re-registered.

In accordance with the rules, the words "public limited company" may be replaced by p.l.c., plc, P.L.C. or PLC.

Re-registration under the Companies Act does not constitute a new legal entity but merely subjects the company to certain additional company law rules.



Signed

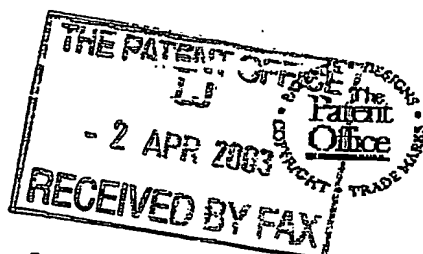
Hebehen

Dated

30 April 2004

Patents Form 1/77

Patents Act 1977
(Rule 16)



02APR03 07:19-1 00289
P01/7700 0.00-0307616.3

1/77

Request for grant of a patent

(See the notes on the back of this form. You can also get an explanatory leaflet from the Patent Office to help you fill in this form)

The Patent Office

Cardiff Road
Newport
South Wales
NP10 8QQ

1. Your reference

RH/DAS/SEB/P/75932.GB/B

2. Patent application number

(The Patent Office will fill in this part)

0307616.3 ✓

02 APR 2003 ✓

3. Full name, address and postcode of the or of each applicant (underline all surnames)

MELEXIS NV
Microelectronic Integrated Systems
Rozendaalstraat 12
B-8900 Ieper
Belgium

Patents ADP number (if you know it)

If the applicant is a corporate body, give the country/state of its incorporation

8351702001

Belgium Corporation

4. Title of the invention

CALORIMETRIC FLOW METER

5. Name of your agent (if you have one)

"Address for service" in the United Kingdom to which all correspondence should be sent (including the postcode)

WILSON GUNN SKERRETT
CHARLES HOUSE
148/9 GREAT CHARLES STREET
BIRMINGHAM B3 3HT
UNITED KINGDOM

Patents ADP number (if you know it)

7710734001

6. If you are declaring priority from one or more earlier patent applications, give the country and the date of filing of the or of each of these earlier applications and (if you know it) the or each application number

Country

Priority application number
(if you know it)

Date of filing
(day / month / year)

7. If this application is divided or otherwise derived from an earlier UK application, give the number and the filing date of the earlier application

Number of earlier application

Date of filing
(day / month / year)

8. Is a statement of inventorship and of right to grant of a patent required in support of this request? (Answer 'Yes' if:

a) any applicant named in part 3 is not an inventor, or
b) there is an inventor who is not named as an applicant, or

c) any named applicant is a corporate body.
See note (d))

a)

BEST AVAILABLE COPY

Patents Form 1/77

0065227 02 Apr 03 04:13

Patents Form 1/77

9. Enter the number of sheets for any of the following items you are filing with this form. Do not count copies of the same document

Continuation sheets of this form

Description

9

Claim(s)

Abstract

Drawing(s)

2

only 8

10. If you are also filing any of the following, state how many against each item.

Priority documents

Translations of priority documents

Statement of inventorship and right to grant of a patent (Patents Form 7/77)

Request for preliminary examination and search (Patents Form 8/77)

Request for substantive examination (Patents Form 10/77)

Any other documents (please specify)

11.

I/We request the grant of a patent on the basis of this application.

Signature

Date

William Gun Street

2 April 2003

12. Name and daytime telephone number of person to contact in the United Kingdom

Mr R Hill
0121 236 1038

Warning

After an application for a patent has been filed, the Comptroller of the Patent Office will consider whether publication or communication of the invention should be prohibited or restricted under Section 22 of the Patents Act 1977. You will be informed if it is necessary to prohibit or restrict your invention in this way. Furthermore, if you live in the United Kingdom, Section 23 of the Patents Act 1977 stops you from applying for a patent abroad without first getting written permission from the Patent Office unless an application has been filed at least 6 weeks beforehand in the United Kingdom for a patent for the same invention and either no direction prohibiting publication or communication has been given, or any such direction has been revoked.

Notes

- If you need help to fill in this form or you have any questions, please contact the Patent Office on 08459 500505.
- Write your answers in capital letters using black ink or you may type them.
- If there is not enough space for all the relevant details on any part of this form, please continue on a separate sheet of paper and write "see continuation sheet" in the relevant part(s). Any continuation sheet should be attached to this form.
- If you have answered 'Yes' Patents Form 7/77 will need to be filed.
- Once you have filled in the form you must remember to sign and date it.
- For details of the fee and ways to pay please contact the Patent Office.

Patents Form 1/77

CALORIMETRIC FLOW METER

The present invention relates to calorimetric flow meters, in particular calorimetric flow meters implemented as integrated circuits and to method of manufacturing such a calorimetric flow meter.

5 Calorimetric flow meters measure mass flow and are used in industry and in the medical profession to measure the flow of a fluid. A typical calorimetric flow meter comprises a tube heated by a heater located halfway along the tube, the unheated ends of the tube remaining at ambient temperature. When the heater is on and no fluid flows in the tube the heating causes a temperature distribution in
10 the tube whereby the temperature drops linearly with distance from the heater. When a fluid flow is present in the tube, heat exchange takes place between the tube and the fluid. Upstream from the heater fluid flow will cool the tube slightly and downstream the fluid flow will heat the tube slightly. The resultant temperature distribution along the tube is now uneven. Temperature sensors
15 positioned halfway between the heater and the ends of the tube are operative to detect the difference ΔT between the measured upstream and downstream temperatures.

The temperature difference ΔT between upstream and downstream is proportional to the mass flow rate Φ_m . The relation between the temperature
20 difference ΔT and mass flow rate Φ_m is also dependant on the heat conductivity of the tube and the heat capacity of the fluid.

The mass flow rate \dot{Q}_m to temperature difference ΔT relation is not dependant upon the fluids viscosity or heat conductivity unlike for hot-wire or Venturi sensors advantageously making the calibration of a Calorimetric Flow Meter independent of the fluid. In order to make it convenient to use a Calorimetric Flow Meter in a wide range of industrial applications it is necessary to be able to produce a low cost robust Calorimetric Flow Meter. The best presently available Calorimetric Flow Meters are manufactured substantially from silicon and are potentially easy to damage.

It is therefore an object of the present invention to provide an improved Calorimetric Flow Meter.

According to a first aspect of the present invention there is provided a Calorimetric Flow Meter comprising an integrated circuit assembly incorporating a fluid flow channel, at least two temperature sensing elements operative to measure the temperature in different regions of the channel and a heating element located in between the temperature sensing elements to heat a region of the channel, wherein the integrated circuit assembly is encapsulated in a housing, the housing defining a fluid inlet allowing fluid to enter the channel and a fluid outlet allowing fluid to exit the channel.

Such an arrangement allows a Calorimetric Flow Meter to be implemented using silicon integrated circuit-based sensors which offer the user improved accuracy and reliability together with small size, low weight and when implemented together with digital or microprocessor control, enhanced flexibility

and performance thus reducing the cost of the flow meter and making it suitable for a wider range of applications. Furthermore encapsulation of the integrated circuit provides a robust flow meter also increasing the range of applications to which it is suited.

5 Preferably, the channel is provided upon a reverse face of the integrated circuit and the temperature sensing elements and heat sensing element are provided upon a front face. Most preferably the heating element is located above the midpoint of the channel and there are two temperature sensing elements each being positioned substantially equivalent between the heating element and the
10 ends of the channel.

Preferably the temperature sensing elements are operative to detect a temperature difference between their locations.

Preferably the integrated circuit consists of a CMOS integrated circuit. Most preferably means are provided to allow communication between the
15 integrated circuit and external circuitry. The integrated circuit may additionally incorporate processing means to calculate a mass flow from the temperature difference detected by the temperature sensing elements. Alternatively the necessary processing circuitry may be provided externally.

Additional circuit elements may be incorporated into the integrated circuit.
20 These additional circuit elements may be used to control the heating means, interface between the heating and sensing means and external electronic control means, receive and store calibration data for the temperature sensing means,

convert analogue signals to digital signals, carry out calculations on the digital signals to facilitate improved or additional performance or to improve accuracy or to compensate the measurements for external or internal change or error or carry out such actions and processes as are common in electronically controlled sensors.

5 Preferably the integrated circuit is mounted on a lead frame, holes in the lead frame coinciding with each end of the channel, the lead frame across the mouth of the channel so as to form a passageway. Most preferably there are slots provided in the lead frame alongside that portion of the lead frame forming a wall of the passageway, the slots act to thermally isolate the passageway from the rest
10 of the lead frame. Preferably the slots do not extend past the holes in the lead frame at either end of the passageway, thus allowing the bulk of the lead frame to act as a heat sink for the ends of the passageway, thus helping to maintain them at or close to the ambient temperature.

According to a second aspect of the present invention there is provided a
15 method of manufacturing an encapsulated calorimetric flow meter comprising the following steps:

providing an integrated circuit assembly according to the first aspect of the present invention;

applying a quantity of gel to the integrated circuit such as to cover at least
20 each end of the channel, thereby forming a gel-covered assembly;

inserting the gel-covered assembly into a cavity of a molding tool ensuring that at least a portion of the gel is in contact with a surface of the cavity;

introducing a plastic mold compound into the cavity so as to encapsulate the gel-covered assembly except for the portion in contact with the cavity surface ;

5. and

removing the assembly from the cavity, whereby there is an opening defined in the plastic mould encapsulating the gel-covered assembly at each end of the channel thus allowing fluid to flow through the channel.

Preferably in order that the channel is not filled by encapsulant it is filled with gel before being encapsulated. Alternatively or additionally the step of mounting the integrated circuit on a lead frame before encapsulation is included, wherein the lead frame is provided with holes which coincide with the end of the channel when the integrated circuit is mounted. The gel is then applied so as to cover the holes in the lead frame, thus resulting in fluid being free to flow into one end of the channel and out of the other.

The heating element and temperature sensing elements may be formed by any suitable technique. The channel is preferably formed by etching, but alternatively may be formed by use of any other suitable technique.

In order that the present invention is more clearly understood, a preferred embodiment of the invention will be described hereinafter with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 shows a schematic diagram of a calorimetric flow meter

Figure 2 shows a graphical representation of the temperature profile within the channel of a calorimetric flow meter

Figure 3 shows an isometric view of a preferred embodiment of a low cost calorimetric flow meter in accordance with the present invention.

Figure 4 shows a cross section through the flow meter along the centre line of the integrated circuit

Referring to figure 1 a calorimetric flow meter known from the prior art comprises a tube 10 through which a fluid may flow. A heater 12 is positioned halfway along the tube 10. Upstream and downstream temperature sensors 14, 16 are provided located substantially halfway between the heater 12 and the ends of tube 10.

In the absence of fluid flow in the tube 10 and any temperature difference between the ends of the tube, the temperature distribution in the tube when heater 12 is switched on is represented by line 18 in figure 2. The temperature drops linearly with distance from the heater from a maximum value adjacent to the heater 12 to the ambient temperature at the ends of the tube 10. When fluid flows through the tube 10 heat exchange occurs between the fluid and the tube 10 and causes the temperature on the upstream side of the tube to drop slightly and the temperature on the downstream side of the tube to rise slightly.

The temperature sensors 14, 16 are operative to detect the temperature difference ΔT between the upstream and downstream sides of the tube. The mass flow rate ϕ_m is proportional to the temperature difference ΔT and thus by measuring the temperature difference ΔT the mass flow rate ϕ_m can be calculated.

- 5 The relation between the mass flow rate ϕ_m and the temperature difference ΔT is described by the following expression

$$\phi_m = 8 \frac{k}{c_p} \frac{S}{L} \frac{\Delta T}{T_{heater}} \left[\frac{kg}{s} \right]$$

- Where C_p is the heat capacity of the fluid, k is the heat conductivity of the tube, S is the cross section of the tube wall, L is the tube length, and T_{heater} is the
10 temperature of the heater.

- Figures 3 and 4 show an encapsulated calorimetric flow meter comprising an integrated circuit 104 mounted on a lead frame 102. The integrated circuit has a channel 105 provided in its lower face, the channel being aligned with two holes 103 provided in the lead frame, the holes 103 coinciding with the opposite ends of
15 the channel 105. There are further slots 111 in the lead frame 102 alongside the integrated circuit to thermally isolate it from the rest of the lead frame 102 which acts as a heat sink to keep the entry and exit fluid at ambient temperature.

- The integrated circuit has a heating element 108 and two temperature sensing elements 106 provided on its upper surface along with any other necessary
20 control circuitry (not shown).

Typically control circuitry can be provided to control the heating means, interface between the heating and sensing means and external electronic control means, receive and store calibration data for the temperature sensing means, convert analogue signals to digital signals, carry out calculations on the digital
5 signals to facilitate improved or additional performance or to improve accuracy or to compensate the measurements for external or internal change or error or to carry out other such actions and processes as are common in electronically controlled sensors.

The heating element 108 is located above and in line with the centre of the
10 channel 105. The temperature sensing elements 106 are located above the channel 105 and on opposite sides of the heating element 108 substantially equidistant between the heating element 108 and the ends of the channel 105. Typically the heating element 108 and the temperature sensing elements 106 are implemented as semiconductor elements using conventional CMOS processing.

15 The integrated circuit 104 and lead frame 102 are encapsulated within a suitable mould compound 110. This provides protection for the device and thereby enhances its reliability. Conducting pins 113 are provided allowing the integrated circuit 104 to be connected to external circuitry. Additionally holes are provided in the moulding compound allowing fluid access to the channel 105.

20 The device is manufactured by first mounting a suitable integrated circuit 104 on to a suitable lead frame 102. The assembly is then inverted and blobs of gel 112, 114 are then deposited onto the lead frame 102 covering the holes 103.

The lead frame 102 is then inserted into a mould 100 and encapsulated within a suitable mould compound. The quantity of gel deposited over each hole 103 is arranged to be such that the gel blob reaches from the surface of the lead frame to make contact with the side of the mould cavity.

5 When the assembly is ejected from the mould cavity the gel can be removed and the holes 103 and the channel 105 exposed to facilitate fluid flow along the channel 105. Alternatively, the integrated circuit 104 can be mounted on a lead frame 102 having a slot corresponding to the channel 105. The channel 105 may then be filled with a quantity of gel before the assembly is encapsulated
10 in a moulding compound. Holes allowing access to the channel 105 can be provided by providing pins or other projections in the mould tool 100 such that the pins or projections are in contact with the gel.

In a further alternative embodiment there are additionally implemented on the integrated circuit temperature measurement means at the fluid input and the
15 fluid output such that the errors due to the inlet and outlet temperatures not being equal can be corrected by calculation or otherwise.

It is however to be understood that the invention is not to be restricted to the details of the above embodiments which are described by way of example only.

1/2

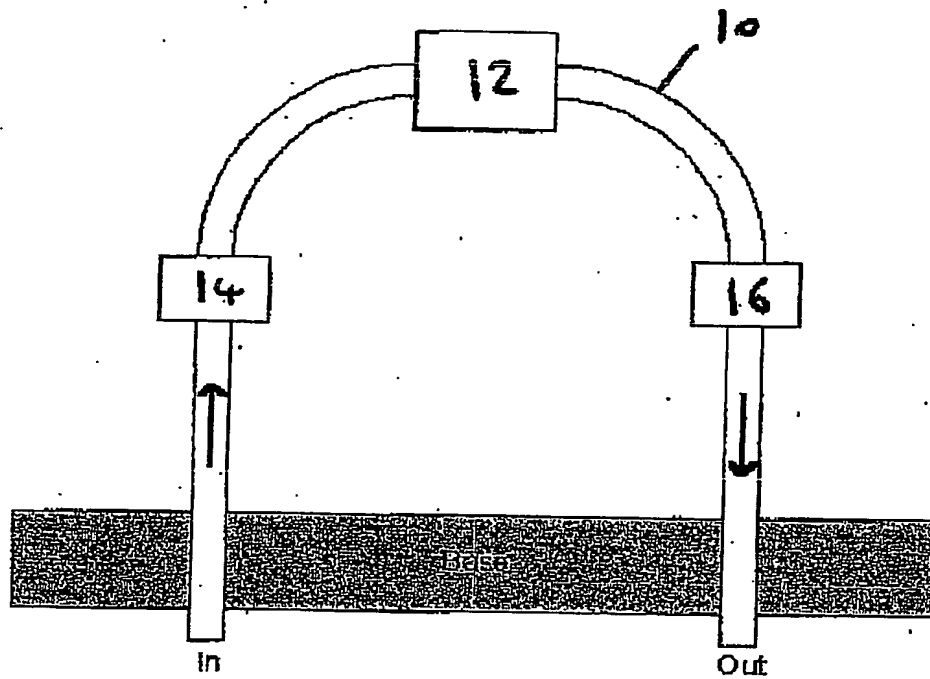


Figure 1

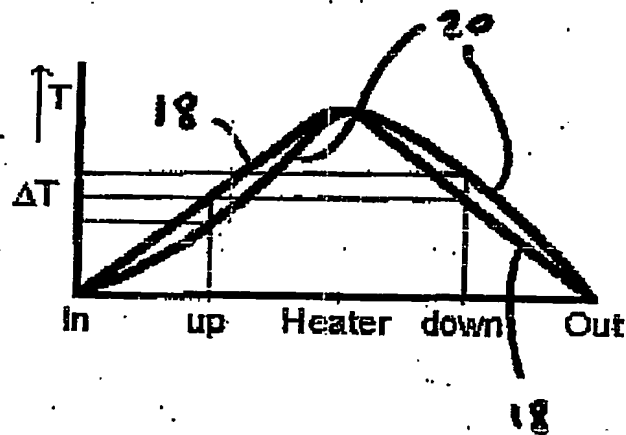
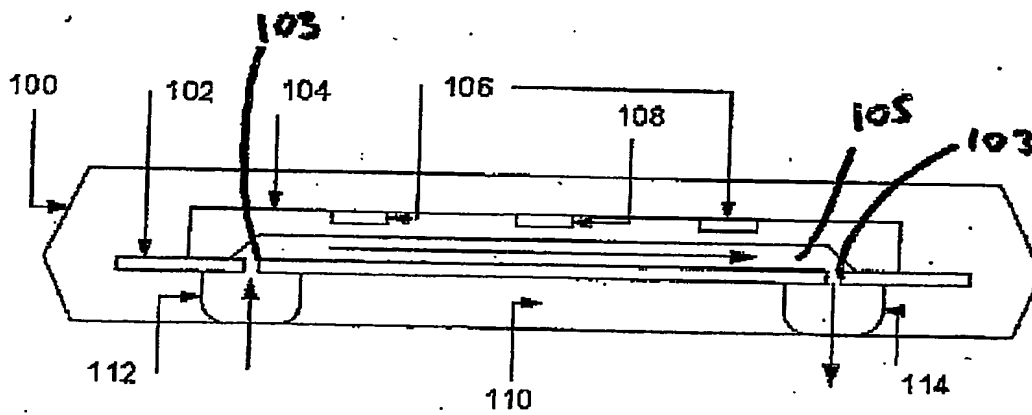
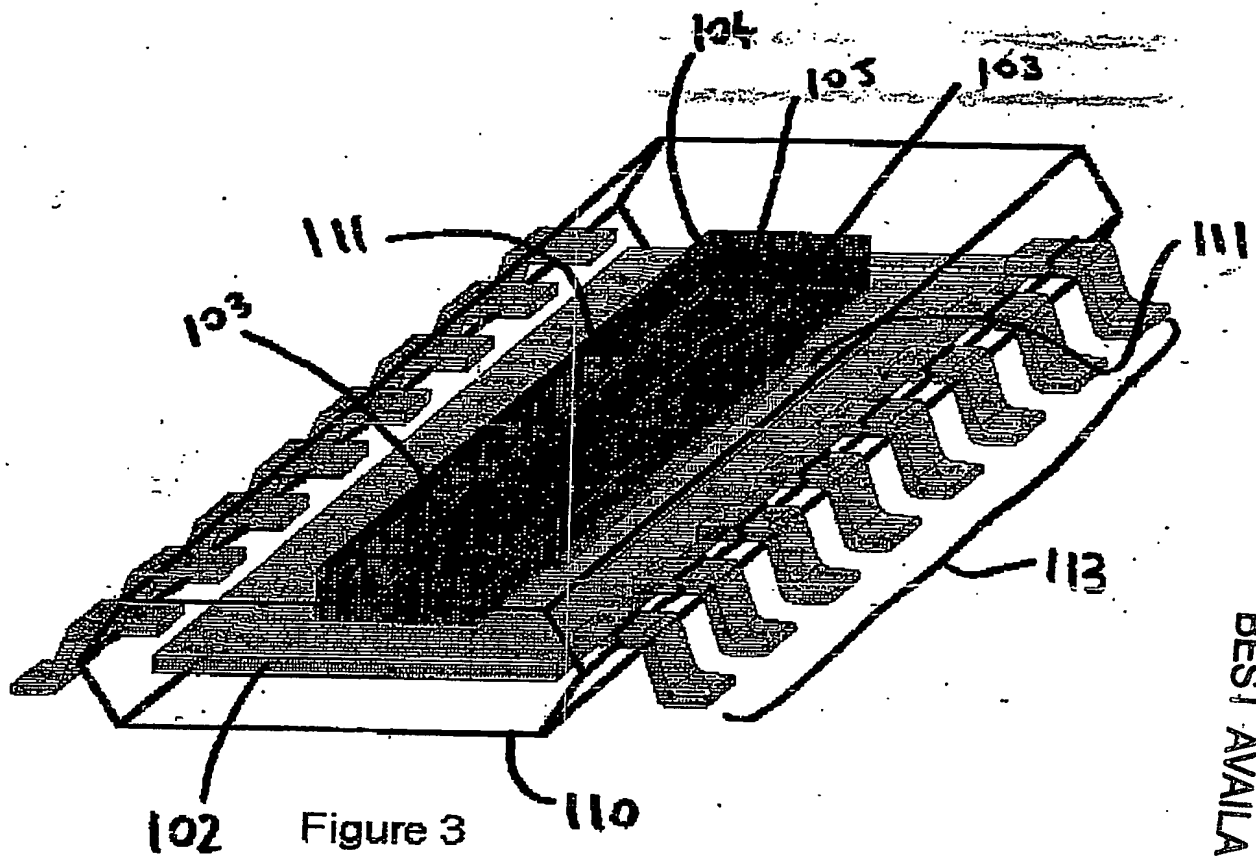


Figure 2

2/2



BEST AVAILABLE COPY

PCT/IB2004/001012

